


HISTORICAL SKETCH  
 OF THE  
 118TH REGIMENT  
 PENNSYLVANIA VOLUNTEERS.  
 "CORN EXCHANGE REGT."

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BY  
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Read at the Ceremonies of Dedicating the Monument on Round Top, Gettysburg,  
 September 8th, 1884.



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## HISTORICAL SKETCH.

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As our first realization of the 118th regiment of Pennsylvania volunteers, memory presents, perhaps more readily than any other, the picture of a line of white tents drawn across the further end of a large handsome grassy field enclosed on three sides by groves of oaks, and fronting on Queen lane, near Falls station of the Norristown railroad.

There we first met each other as fellow-soldiers and formed the friendships that chastened and strengthened by the toils and dangers of our three years' service in the field, grow warmer and stronger with the growing years. There we had our first lessons in military discipline under the guidance of three as brave and handsome field officers as ever drew a blade or bestrode a steed—General Chas. M. Prevost, Col. Jas. Gwyn, and Major Chas. P. Herring.

And there and then came that inspiration, that *esprit de corps*, which incited each and all to bear unsullied, through toilsome march in burning sun or winter frost, into the fire of battle and on to final victory the standard of the Corn Exchange.

CAMP UNION! Do you not see that magnificent line of sturdy youths with flashing sword and glistening bayonet formed in dress parade across the field those August afternoons? Do you not hear the songs, the jests, the merry voices of the happy evening?

And can you forget the sweet and rosy faces of the fair ones, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, clustered around us those brief but bright and joyous days?

Camp Union was established and recruiting commenced early in August, 1862, the first tents being pitched on the 9th. Strict discipline, soldierly bearing and exact compliance with military laws and regulations were from the outset required by Major C. P. Herring, who commanded the camp and received the recruits. Great proficiency was early attained in drill and evolutions, and this most fortunately, for the regiment, still lacking a few recruits to bring it up to the standard number, was hastily, on the 30th of August, mustered into the service of the United States. Pope had suffered defeat at the second battle of Bull Run, and the Capital was in danger.

Orders were received by Col. C. M. Prevost at nine P. M. Sunday, August 31st, to proceed at once with his regiment to Washington. Tents were struck, the men rationed at ten o'clock; in the midst of a drenching rain, the command marched out of Camp Union. Arriving in Baltimore the following evening, the regiment was quartered in a freight depot, and the next morning, joined by a considerable detachment unavoidably left in Philadelphia at the moment of departure, resumed the journey to Washington, where we arrived late in the afternoon of September 2d. The regiment not having been provided with shelter tents, had that night a foretaste of vicissitude in being obliged to bivouac in the damp and chilly open air on a filthy field, almost under the shadow of the Capital. We marched the next day through Washington and across the Potomac by way of Long bridge, to Virginia, encamping at the foot of Fort Albany.

Here we met troops coming in from the late defeat at Bull Run. These were the heroes of the Peninsula, but so dusty, ragged and brown-visaged, I fear we failed to properly appreciate them, and felt that this was the reverse of an inspiring introduction. Before the month was past, however, appearances as between them and us were, if anything, rather in their favor.

On the 8th we moved near to Fort Cochran, where on the 12th we were assigned a position in the Army of the Potomac, viz: to Martindale's brigade, Morell's division, Porter's corps, and at once started on the Antietam campaign.

Our first march extended from camp near Fort Cochran, across the Aqueduct bridge, through Washington, to Silver Springs, Maryland, a distance of fourteen miles. As a specimen of real campaigning it was, if the lesson were needed, disenchanting. The day was clear but excessively warm and sultry, the men were overburdened with unnecessary changes of clothing and many odd knick-knacks provided by kind friends, the pace was especially fatiguing, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, and the halts were badly arranged. When, at sunset, the head of our regimental column had filed into the field assigned us for bivouac, less than forty men were present with the colors, which by the way had been brought up by the colonel himself; the rest of the command were nearly exhausted, struggling up along the line of march.

From Silver Springs our tramp was continued to Rockville, thence to Monocacy (on which day, Sept. 14th, we saw across the valley the flash and smoke of the battle at South Mountain). From Monocacy, through Frederick to near Middletown, thence on the



16th across the Catoctin mountains, over the South Mountain battlefield, and through Boonsboro and Keedysville, we came to Antietam, where, for the first time, we were face to face with the enemy. Bivouac that night was within range of the rebel guns, whose shell bursting overhead and pattering their fragments about us, constituted the evening's tattoo for the sound-enough sleep of our tired men.

Early on the morning of the 17th, the artillery of the two armies heralding the conflict, we were placed in line of battle at about the centre of the field. Our share of the engagement was, however, insignificant. Being part of the Fifth corps, which was held in reserve, our duty for the day amounted simply to supporting a battery posted on a ridge in our front. The following afternoon our command was moved to the left, across the famous stone bridge of the Antietam, and advanced as skirmishers to the ridge above it. Receiving a lively fusilade we suffered our first loss from rebel fire, the wounding of Corporal Sandford, who lost a leg. That night we performed our first tour of picket duty in the enemy's front. The crest of the hill along which our line extended was that so desperately fought for and carried the day before by Burnside's corps. It was literally covered with the intermingled dead of both armies. There, prone among the slain, peering into the darkness over the brow of the hill, we watched and listened through the night for any movement of the enemy. Morning revealed the meaning of the distant rumbling of teams we had heard through the night. The enemy had abandoned his position and retreated across the Potomac. A short march brought us to near the river, where we

rested till the next day, the eventful 20th of September.

The morning of Shepherdstown was dull and misty, but we were early under arms and moving to the river bank. Amused with the new sensation of marching through a river, with joke and laughter we gaily forded the stream. Delighted, too, with the thought of entering a campaign on the enemy's soil (the rebel army the while, so we had heard from a reconnoitering party of the night before, retreating to the south), we were comfortably getting into shape along the shore at the foot of a bluff there overlooking the river, when suddenly sharp orders were given to close up ranks and move quickly along the road leading from the ford. A few minutes later the command rang out, "Right by file into line!" Company E was thrown forward as skirmishers, and became engaged before advancing thirty rods. The evolution of the regiment was hastened to a double-quick, but before our left could get into position the whole line was exposed to a withering fire on front and flanks from an overwhelming force of the advancing enemy. Thus abruptly, for the incidents happened in nearly as few minutes as it takes to tell them, was our regiment, but twenty days from home, rushed into a conflict that proved to be the deadliest of our whole term of service.

Of the six hundred who crossed Blackford's ford that morning, 269 men and 11 officers were stricken down—nearly half of the command, including Col. C. M. Prevost, who received a ball in the shoulder, incapacitating him from duty, and from the effect of which he will be an invalid for life. It was a mere slaughter. Who was responsible for the terrible mis-

take of sending a single regiment into action against a whole corps of the enemy could never be determined. And to add to the account of our misfortunes of that fatal day the arms we carried, English Enfields, we had had no opportunity of trying before, proved at the critical moment to be quite worthless. Most of our men had, in consequence, to stand literally defenceless and be shot down.

Though a more trying ordeal could hardly be devised, the regiment was of stuff to bear the test, and remained where it was posted till the order to retire was given.

From that day we were veterans, and ours was, in the army, "The regiment that fought at Shepherdstown." Of the heroic dead of that field I shall but mention the names of Saunders, Ricketts, Moss and White. The story of their gallantry is familiar to you all.

An act of bravery occurred on the return of the regiment from the slaughter, which is well worthy of record. Capt. L. L. Crocker (then a lieutenant in Company C), after he had crossed the stream saw two of his men—one with his leg torn off, and the other with two wounds in his breast—lying upon the opposite bank. Without a moment's hesitation, and in the face of a shower of shot and shell, he crossed the stream and carried over on his back the wounded men to his own camp.

Shepherdstown, for whatever reason, was only the end of the Antietam campaign, not the commencement of a new one, and we remained inactive through the following October, encamped on the north bank of the river.



During the closing months of the year we marched by easy stages to the Rappahannock, and took an active part in the battle of Fredericksburg. Crossing the river on pontoons in front of the city, the regiment, led by Lieut.-Col. Gwyn, passed through the streets under a terrible hail of the enemy's shot and shell out to and up the historic heights of Marye. In this battle were offered up as our share of the sacrifice ten killed, forty-six wounded, including Major C. P. Herring, who was wounded in both arms, and twenty-six missing.

After Fredericksburg a happy winter was spent in our quarters at camp near Falmouth. Cosy log huts provided with many improvised comforts, merry companions and just enough of drill and picket duty to afford a pleasant variety, comprised about all the elements needed to render, in a soldier's estimation, existence blissful.

History may take little account of the events occurring between the engagements of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, but between these great battles come two incidents that are history to us. The first, a reconnoissance of our brigade across the Rappahannock, into the enemy's lines, at Richard's ford, where, fording the icy stream waist deep, we had a brush with their outposts; the other, being Burnside's second attempt to cross the river. I mean the mud-march—when, everything having been snugly arranged for the army to slip over to the flank and rear of the enemy, we were, expeditiously, not five miles, nor more than an hour or so from camp, let down into the mud by one of those famous Virginia rains.

Our campaigns of 1863 were commenced with that

of Chancellorsville. Marching out of our winter quarters at Falmouth, April 27th, we passed over the familiar road to Hartford church; thence fording the Rappahannock at Kelley's ford, and the Rapidan at Ely's ford, we advanced on the morning of the 30th across a swamp beyond the Chancellor House to a ridge occupied by the enemy in force. Here becoming engaged we opened the battle, but were ordered to retire and avoid a general engagement. This ridge, which we could easily have taken and held for some time, became the object of a fierce contest the next day. Orders for our withdrawal from it was the first, and probably fundamental, error of the disastrous campaign. Bivouacking that night near the Chancellor Mansion, we spent the following day in manoeuvring on the left of the army, in the vicinity of Banks' ford. Returning in the evening, we were posted in some woods near the center, where we were subjected to a fierce shelling.

On the 2d, having been moved at daylight to the right center, we became engaged in checking the rebel advance after the abandonment of the Chancellor position. The third day of the fight, although much annoyed by rebel sharpshooters, we remained inactive. On the 4th, however, a larger part of the regiment, commanded by Captain Donaldson, made a gallant charge upon a body of the enemy posted in a clump of woods in our front, driving them out and holding the position, which was necessary to the rectification of our line.

The fifth and last day of the Chancellorsville campaign brought us again to the post of honor. With a few men from other regiments and under command

of Major C. P. Herring, we acted as rear-guard of the army. Forming across the road from time to time we held the enemy in check till the river had been safely crossed by the last of our troops. Thus it happened the first and last shots of that great battle were fired by our regiment. Returning again to camp near Falmouth for a few days, we left it finally for the Gettysburg campaign.

May and June were spent seemingly uselessly in marching, excepting when at Aldie we found the enemy, who gave us one day's occupation in driving him back to Snicker's Gap.

Crossing the Potomac at Edwards' ferry, June 26th, and marching rapidly, by July 1st we passed, with hearty cheers for our native State, over the Pennsylvania border. Halting for a single hour at Hanover in the evening, we continued the tramp through the night till three A. M. of the 2d, when we reached this place (Gettysburg), having accomplished thirty-six miles in the one march. After a few hours' sleep we were, shortly after daylight, drawn up in line of battle in the rear of Culp's Hill, whence we were withdrawn at ten o'clock. Resting till four P. M., we were taken on the double-quick to the famous wheat field, arriving there none too soon to get into line and receive the advancing enemy. Our position soon became untenable, and, though not until we had dealt a very effective fire into the enemy's line and had checked his advance in our front, we fell back in perfect order to the foot of Little Round Top, where, night soon coming on, we remained to sleep on our arms. Round Top, the key of the army's left, and held on the 2d at the cost of so many lives, was assigned to us on the morning of the



3d. Here the enemy, except to annoy us with his sharpshooters and to threaten the position by a fierce shelling, left us in undisturbed possession, and from this lofty spot we had the rare privilege of witnessing that grand charge of the rebels across yonder plain. Emerging from the wood of Seminary Ridge the lines of Southern veterans moved in perfect order down the slope and out upon the field. Their sudden appearance, the boldness of the movement, and the magnificence of the military display there presented thrilled us with emotion and compelled our admiration. The perfect alignment and formation of their force was maintained till nearly half way across the plain, when our terrible fire began to thin their ranks and check the impetus of their movement. A little later the mass, confused and wavering, broke into a scattering mob and streamed back into the wood beyond the plain. Gettysburg was won. The storm-wave of rebellion, rearing its haughty crest, vainly dashed upon the strand and, melting into foam, receded, broken and disordered, back into the ebbing tide.

Realizing, from the moment the great artillery duel of this battle commenced, that the enemy was about to make his supreme effort, the minutes of that famous charge were not without anxiety to us, but considering the intense suspense of our friends at home, and the fears they had of possible disaster to our arms in this campaign on northern soil, I think I state an interesting fact when I say, that none of us in the army here had at that or any other moment any doubt of the result. Whatever may have been our ideas about the enemy getting into Pennsylvania, we knew that we were going to drive him back into Virginia.



Gettysburg has yet another incident attaching us to its history, since it was our fortune to fire the last shots at the enemy on this field. On the morning of July 4th, leaving this spot we advanced over there at the left of Round Top, to reconnoitre the rebel position. We drove in his skirmishers, drew his fire and then retired.

The manœuvres of the succeeding months involved us in the operations of Williamsport and the fight at Wapping Heights in Manassas Gap, and by September 16th brought us to Culpepper. Then followed the retreat to Centreville, with the actions at Brandy Station and Bristow Station. Readvancing to Culpepper, we fought our last battle of 1863 at Rappahannock Station.

Winter quarters of 1863-4 were located near Beverly Ford, where, excepting to participate in the fruitless campaign of Mine Run, we remained till the end of April.

Leaving Beverly Ford May 1st, camping a few days near Brandy Station, and crossing the Rapidan May 4th, we opened the Wilderness battle the next morning by our charge along the Orange Court House road. Col. Gwyn was here wounded in the leg. Thence continuously, from May 5th to June 6th, closely following the enemy, we were daily under fire, advancing, skirmishing or engaged in the more serious conflicts of Spottsylvania, Laurel Hill (where our regiment captured 200 prisoners and a stand of colors), North Anna, Cold Harbor and Chickahominy.

Crossing the James River June 16th, the regiment, marching rapidly, reached Petersburg late the same night, and in the morning was again in action in the

vicinity of the Norfolk railroad. Moving a short distance to the left on the 21st, we made during the night an advanced intrenchment in which, after converting it into a bomb-proof, we remained nearly two months; during all this time, both day and night, under a constant mortar shelling. Leaving the trenches August 15th, we participated in all the subsequent movements against the enemy's right down to the final surrender.

Of these operations the battle of Weldon railroad occurred August 18th, and that of Peeble's Farm, September 30th. This latter affair is worthy of especial remark. In the morning we had charged and carried a line of the enemy's works, including a redoubt whose guns did us great damage, and in the evening were advanced to repel a rebel attempt to retake the position. A portion of the 9th corps, that had been thrown out beyond the line we stormed in the morning, was giving way before the enemy's fire when we were ordered into line at a double-quick. In going into position our guides took their places with inverted muskets, the men were aligned as accurately as if on drill, and not a shot was fired until the order for it was given. During all this time we were under a sharp fire and were losing some of our men. That day, morning and evening, our loss was fifty-three out of 198, roll call at night showing only 147 men and six officers present for duty; and this, it should be understood, was after we had received some 450 recruits above the number of our original complement. Major Wilson commanded the regiment on that occasion.

A raid by the 5th corps across the Nottaway and beyond Jarrett's Station, where we destroyed a por-

tion of the Weldon railroad, from December 6th to 12th, ended our 1864 series of campaigns. Unlike the preceding winters, that of 1864-5 included much activity. We built log-huts at several times, but, the operations of the left requiring the regiment to frequently change location, we did not remain long enough to enjoy them.

Our first battle of 1865 was the engagement at Dabney's Mill, where we suffered serious losses, Captain Scott being among the killed, and General C. P. Herring losing a leg.

The final campaign of the army of the Potomac was opened by the fight, under the personal direction of General Meade, at White Oak Road, our regiment having again the honor of being among the first in the fray. Two days afterward, our corps co-operating with Sheridan's cavalry, the 118th was engaged in the battle of Five Forks, the capture of which point, the key to the whole rebel position, forced the evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond.

Pursuing the flying enemy, we made, during the day and night of April 8th, a forced march, which, placing our corps beyond the rebel army and across its line of retreat, resulted in Lee's surrender.

At Appomattox, as so often before in the career of our regiment, again we had, and in this the last conflict in Virginia, the post of honor, for we received, advancing in line of battle that 9th of April, 1865, the last shots ever fired by our adversary.

Your regiment, too, was one of the ten or twelve—only those of the 1st division, 5th corps—appointed to perform the ceremony of receiving the arms and colors from the army of northern Virginia. Still

later, it was an officer of this regiment who commanded a detachment that burnt and destroyed the surrendered rebel caissons and ammunition; the last vestige on the last battlefield of Lee's great army.

From Appomattox by easy marches through Petersburg and Richmond we reached Washington and appeared in the final reviews; thence going by rail to Philadelphia we were mustered out of service.

The last appearance the regiment made was on the occasion of the parade and review of returned Philadelphia soldiers, June 5th, 1865.

Detailed accounts of the long marches accomplished, of the infinitude of hardships endured by the regiment, and of the many acts of gallantry performed by individual officers and men, are regretfully omitted from this brief sketch; but, brief as it may be, it will at least indicate the value and effectiveness of the service rendered the government by the Corn Exchange in furnishing this regiment, and will, I trust, explain and justify any seeming excess of pride we who followed its colors may exhibit for the old organization.



The regiment was engaged in thirty-four great battles and skirmishes, as follows :

ANTIETAM,  
 SHEPHERDSTOWN,  
 FREDERICKSBURG,  
 CHANCELLORSVILLE,  
 GETTYSBURG,  
 BRISTOL STATION,  
 RAPPAHANNOCK STATION,  
 MINE RUN,  
 WILDERNESS,  
 SPOTTSYLVANIA,  
 TOLOPOTOMY CREEK, LAUREL HILL,  
 MAGNOLIA SWAMP, PO RIVER,  
 BETHESDA CHURCH, TODD'S TAVERN,  
 COLD HARBOR, JERICHO'S MILLS,  
 NORFOLK RAILROAD, PEACH ORCHARD,  
 JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, NORTH ANNA,  
 PETERSBURG, HARRIS FARM,  
 WELDON RAILROAD,  
 PEEBLE'S FARM  
 (including storming of Fort McRae),  
 CHAPPEL HOUSE,  
 HATCHE'S RUN,  
 RAID ON WELDON R. R.,  
 DABNEY'S FARM,  
 LEWIS' FARM,  
 BOYDTON PL'K RD.,  
 FIVE FORKS,  
 APPOMATTOX.

Mustered into service, August 31st, 1862.

Mustered out, June 1st, 1865.

Original Muster.....	960
Recruits. ....	456
Final Muster of Original Members.....	139
Killed, Wounded and Missing.....	978

